

The Fourscore and Eleventh Epistle
OF
LUCIUS ANNÆUS SENECA
The Philosopher.
WRITTEN
Upon Occasion of the sudden BURNING
OF
Lions in France.

Translated out of the Original into English Verse.



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СЕРГЕЙ МИХАИЛОВИЧ

*The Four-score and Eleventh Epistle of Lucius
Annæus Seneca the Philosopher : Written
upon occasion of the sudden Burning of LIONS
in FRANCE.*

UR *Liberalis* is with grief and Pity
 Fill'd at the burning of his Native City.
 This direful accident might any move,
 Though to that City not concern'd in love:
 And even to his mind might add more strength:
 Who, what he fear'd, has found to come at length.
 But this un-look'd for chance, and which is more
 Un-heard of, 'tis no wonder that before
 'Twas heard or thought on, it was fiercely sent,
 Since it was also without President,
 A raging Fire hath very much annoy'd
 And damag'd Cities, but hath none destroy'd.
 For where quick fire is thrown with hostile hand,
 Houses un-touch'd in many places stand.
 And no Earth-quake hath been so fatal known,
 That a whole City hath been overthrown.

And no consuming flame hath been so dire,
 But it left something for another fire.
 So many famous Piles, which singly might
 Crace several Cities, fell down in one night.
 And in a time of Peace as much fell out
 As scarce a cruel war could bring about.
 Who could believe wars ceasing every where
 When through the World no dangers did appear,
 That *Lions* so renown'd should by that chance
 Be sought and doubted, where it stood in *France*.
 Fortune permits even those who suffer woe,
 To fear the ill they were to undergo.
 Great things have time before th' are overthrown,
 This famous City in one night was none.
 Lastly, I'm longer telling thee the thing,
 Than all those Buildings were in perishing.
 These things disturb our *Liberalis* mind,
 To patience in his own affairs confin'd.
 Nor is he so perplex'd without a cause,
 The un-expectedness of chances draws
 More trouble, and the novelty of things
 To all calamity Addition brings.
 And there's no mortal man, being struck with wonder,
 But some conceived trouble must lie under.
 Wherefore in nothing we should be surpris'd,
 Our minds in fore-sight should be exercis'd,
 To weigh not only what's un-usual
 But to consider too what may befall.

What

What is so strong, 'gainst which when Fortune's bent
 Though glorious, cannot receive detriment?
 Or which she do's not shake, or more molest
 By how much it was greater than the rest?
 What's difficult by Fortune to be done?
 She walks in no way always, nor alone.
 Somtimes our own hands 'gainst our selves she bends,
 And then without an Author mischief sends.
 No time is free, our very pleasures turn
 Into great woe, and often make us mourn.
 War sometimes rises in the midst of Peace,
 And that which seems our troubles to release
 Turns into fear: a Friend do's love forgo,
 And a Companion is become a foe.
 A Summers calmness many times do's draw
 A Storm more fierce than any Winters flaw.
 Without an Enemy we find a war,
 Such is our fate, that many times we are
 By our too great Felicity, to woe
 Expos'd, when we no other causes know.
 Diseases the most temp'rate will assail,
 The Ptisick on the strongest will prevail.
 Upon the guiltless punishment is laid,
 And tumults will mens quietness invade;
 Fortune oft chooses something new, whereby
 On those who have forgot her power, she'll fly.
 Whats'ever many ages have erected,
 By the gods favour, and mens pains effected,

One day dissolves. He gives a long delay
 To hast'ning Evils, who allows a day.
 An hour, a moment is sufficient space
 Great Kingdomes to throw down, and quite erace.
 It would some solace to our weakness bring,
 And to th' Affairs of men, if every thing
 Did not increase with slowness, and with hast
 Dissolve and fall. There's nothing that stands fast
 Private or publick. Fear in those things which please
 And flourish most, do's soonest on us sease.
 And ills which are by us least thought upon,
 Without tumultuous causes will fall on.
 Kingdomes which have endur'd both Civil wars,
 And Forrain, have without publick jars
 Been ruin'd. And few Cities have enjoy'd
 Felicity, and never been annoy'd.
 We therefore should weigh all things, and advance
 Our constant minds, 'gainst ev'ry sad mischance.
 Think therefore still on Wars, and Sicknesse,
 On Shipwrecks, Banishments, and the Excess
 Of Torments. Think thy Country may be taken
 From thee, or else by thee may be forsaken.
 Think Fortune may expose thee in a rude
 Desert; and think that where a Multitude
 Is stifted, there a Desert may be made.
 Let this condition of Mankind be laid,
 Before our eyes, and let's not only weigh
 What happens often, but let's think what may

Befal

Befallē and would we not our errours rae,
Mistaking things un-usual for new,
Let us bold fortune look in her full power,
How many Cities did her rage devour
In *Afia* and *Achaia* by one way?
How many in *Syria*, and *Macedonia*?
Cyprus in many parts could not avoid
That fate, but hath been many times destroy'd.
How oft hath *Paphus* Earthquakes felt, and sped
As ill, in her own ruines buried.
We who have often heard of Towns thus lost,
How small a part are we of men so lost!
Then let us gainst Misfortunes our minds raise,
And think th' are not so great as rumor says.
Fire hath consum'd a City great and rich,
The Ornament of Provinces, in which
It did both seated and exempted lyes
Yet built upon one hill not very high.
Nay, all those Cities famous through the world,
VVill at the length be into ruine hurl'd.
And there will not in future time appear
A Mark, or any Footstep wherei they were.
See'st thou not that *Achaia's* stately Towns
Are so destroy'd, that there remains no Bounds
Nor yet Foundations to make it good
To the Beholders, where those Cities stood.
Not only what is fram'd by hand and art
Time do's consume, the tops of Mountains flatt.

And tumble down, whole Regions have been found
 To sink, and many Countryes have been drown'd
 Far distant from the sea. High hills which were
 Famous by fire, fire did in slunder rear. vnam wch
 And Promontories, which have been a Mark
 For Marriners to guide and steer their Bark; wch
 At first whereof they usually have joy'd; i. wch
 Have been laid flat, and utterly destroy'd; and
 The very works of Nature troubled are; no wch
 And therefore we with equal minds should bear
 All Cities fate. Things made, were made to fall,
 And Dissolution waits upon them all. Nam wch
 VVhether the violence of inward wind, or not
 Striving a passage through the Earth to find, but
 Shakes the great weight of Earth? Or whether
 Those hidden torrents joyn their forces together? I
 Or that the heat of inward flames do swaſt lib. 11.
 The Ligaments of Earth which ty'd it fast? iud 20.
 Or whether Age against vwhich there's no defence,
 Does by degrees effect this violence. iud 11. 11.
 Or that a poſonous Air the Land bereft it self
 Of People, and infected what was left? Nam A
 To repeat all the ways of destiny you wot about
 VVer long; but by experience I blyndlye of me
 Am ſure of this, that mortal things are call me to
 Condemned into Mortality to falh. blyndlye of me
 VVe live not where we can find any thing to ſet
 That is ſecure, but daily perishing. blyndlye of me

These comfortt and she like I re-commend
 To Liberalis our un-doubted friend, and neare
 Exceedingly inflamed with thy loue low as soone
 Of his own Country, whose sad fate may prove
 No small advantage; for perhaps that chance
 Ordained was its glory shooke it aduance.
 Many great things have falleyn, to rise more high,
 And often are improv'd by injury.
*T*magine, a foe to th' happiness
 Of Rome, would often when't was burnt profess,
*T*he burning he did not so much deplore, as say
*A*s that it wold rise greater than before.
 And in this City we may well suppose,
 No labour will be wanting, till it grows
 From a vast heap of ashes and of dust,
 Greater and firmer than it was at first; mean
 I whish't may last, and being built again
 With better Omen, longer may remain;
 For since that Town was built, it is not past
 An hundred years, an age with some men last
*P*lancus, by fitness of the place first made
 The Town a great and noted Mart for Trade.
*V*Which notwithstanding hath endur'd much rage
*V*ithin the space but of a humane age
 And therefore let us be prepared still
 To suffer patiently all sorts of ill;
 And know there's nothing Fortune cannot do,
 Both to advancement and to mine too.

And that her power on Empires do's prevail
 As upon Emperours, and do's affail
 Cities as well as Men; but which things we
 Should not repine, or discontented be.
 We are brought into a World where we must live
 Under those Laws. Do they thee please? Then give
 Obedience. Do they displease? Thou art
 At Liberty at all times to depart.
 Thou might'st complain if any of these were put
 And thrown on thee alone unjustly, but
 Since this necessity as well do's wait
 On high as low, be reconcil'd to Fate,
 Which all things will dissolve. Reason presents
 No cause at all, that we by Monuments
 And Tombs should measured be. One fate attends
 On mortal men, and brings them to their ends.
 We are born un-equal, but we equal dye.
 The same of Cities as of Dwellers, I
 Do here declare. *Ardea* was as well
 Taken as *Rome*, though this did that excell.
 The great Ordainer of all humane right
 Makes no distinction of us by the bright
 Splendour of birth and titles, longer than
 We are alive, and conversant with men.
 And when we end this Mortal life, begon
 From hence, says he, depart ambition;
 All Mortals walk one way, and all things ly
 Equally under common destiny.

None, then an other can be more secure,
Or know what he to morrow shall endure.

Young Alexander King of Macedon

Geometry unhappily begun

To learn, the smallness of the Earth to know
Whereof the least part did him homage owe.
Unhappy, I say, in that he should have known
How false a Sir-name he did vainly own.

For what can in a little place be great?

The points whereof the Master did entreat
Were subtle, and not easily discern'd,
But with a diligent attention learn'd;

Not apprehended by a Frantick man
Whose thoughts did rove beyond the Ocean.

*Teach me, said he, those things which will be made
More easie to me : T' whom the Master said,
These things are still the same, alter'd to none,
And are as difficult to all, as one.*

Think Nature thus to all men does declare
Those things at which you grumble, the same are
To all, nor can they be more easie made.

To any, but whosoever shall perswade

~~But himself~~, without compulsion, to forsake
All fear of chances, will them easie make.

But how? By equalnes of mind. Th' art born
To endure sorrow, hunger, thirst, and scorn.
And if thou longer shalt with men remain,
Thou sickness, loss, and ruine may'st sustain.

But

But yet there is no reason thou shouldest give
 Belief to those things which about shee strive.
 For none of them are ill, or hard to bear.
 It is report of men that brings this fear.
 And what can be more vain, than to be vex'd
 At rumour, and to be for words perplex'd?
Demetrius that he might drive away
 Such foolishness, oft wittily would say,
I care no more what foolish people speak
Than whether wind upward or downward break.
 It is a madnes we are brought to, when
 We fear to be defam'd b' infamous men;
 As thou without good reason didst fear fame,
 So what thou didst not fear, when once the same
 Shall bid thee, thou wilt fear; can it be thought
 A good man suffers by false rumours, fraught
 With scandals? Nor is Death hurt, by what
 Is said of it, though some be scar'd there-at.
 None, who accuse Death, have experience got.
 'Tis rashnes to condemn what we know not.
 But this we know, that 'tis a benefic
 To many, and that many are by it
 Discharg'd from torments, poverty, and grief.
 And find in weariness, and wrongs relief.
 If Death be under our own power, then where
 Is any other power that we should fear?

FINIS.